

January 21st, 2021

Tony Thurmond  
State Superintendent, CA Department of Education  
1430 N Street  
Sacramento, California 95814

**Re: Department of Asian American Studies at UCLA OPPOSITION to Current Revisions of CA ESMC**

Dear Superintendent Thurmond,

As faculty in the Department of Asian American Studies at UCLA, we are writing in **opposition** to the **current version of the CA Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (ESMC)**, which does not reflect the values, principles, and pedagogy of Ethnic Studies. Among many issues, we particularly object to the removal of Arab American Studies from its place in Asian American/Pacific Islander Studies and its placement in an “interethnic bridge-building appendix.” As scholars and teachers who comprise what is arguably the foremost Asian American and Pacific Islander Studies department in the higher education, we are unequivocal in our assessment that Arab American Studies has an important and central place in our field. This is why our department includes Arab American Studies and Palestine Studies in our teaching pedagogy and scholarly research. In our assessment, any Asian American/Pacific Islander Studies curriculum which does not include Arab American Studies is critically flawed and incomplete.

We echo and uplift the demands of the Save Arab American Studies Coalition and join thousands of Ethnic Studies scholars who argue that there can be no meaningful resolution to this matter without the following action:

- Re-empower experts in the field of Ethnic Studies to decide on revisions to the ESMC that align with the principles, values, and pedagogy of Ethnic Studies.
- Give space to Arab American Studies—including the study of Palestine—to continue the contributions and inroads already built within the Asian American Studies section of the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum.
- Approve an ESMC that is anti-racist, decolonial and liberatory—that centers the voices and experiences of communities of color and their struggles for liberation.

We are also concerned that the Ethnic Studies educators who wrote the original ESMC have been sidelined, while politicians and lobbyists have wielded the most influence in what revisions get made. The sidelining of the original committee echoes an all-too-familiar experience Ethnic Studies scholars have faced and reestablishes the very same Euro-centric and White-Supremacist frameworks that the student movements of the 1960’s sought to overturn by demanding the formation of Ethnic Studies. Further, disregarding the expertise of scholars of color who are leaders of the field demonstrates the way in which public education continues to be co-opted by financial and political interests that do not prioritize the knowledge generated by historically oppressed groups nor advance social justice for these communities, a situation which undermines the primary purposes of Ethnic Studies.

Arab histories and communities should not be relegated to an appendix and heavily repressed and censored. The erasure of Arab, Muslim and Palestinian communities within the ESMC, enables and underwrites the anti-Arab, Islamophobic and anti-Palestinian racism and violence that impacts our communities including through logics of war, diaspora, imperialism, and state targeted programs of enforcement. Instead, the ESMC should foster critical pedagogy which can challenge the ideological and structural forms of oppression *all* our communities experience. Arab American scholars, teachers, and students have played pivotal roles in the shaping of Ethnic Studies curriculum, community engagement programs, funding and support, and campus programs. We hope ESMC will allow such work to continue and grow and contribute to our education programs across our State.

The marginalization of Arab American Studies is part and parcel of an overall revision of the ESMC that evacuates it of the decolonial, anti-racist, and liberatory foundations of Ethnic Studies as a field. Foundational Ethnic Studies theories and frameworks, including the definition of race, has been eliminated, narrowly defined, or moved to the footnotes. This removal shifts our field away from its intellectual, community, and social movement origins and institutional position. Ethnic Studies as a field draws its inspiration from the civil rights struggles of the 1960s and 1970s, and as such, our department [“value\[s\] the social relevance of education, as well as the connection between academia, the community, and disadvantaged social groups.”](#) We believe in the power of education as a means to foster social justice and an equal distribution of resources, power, and freedom for all our communities. Therefore we cannot stand idle as we continue to witness our communities endure constant attack, exclusion and censorship. We urge those who oversee the ESMC to account for all communities who are being excluded and silenced and to maintain the integrity of the principles the field was founded by and for.

We call on the CA Department of Education to take immediate action to protect the integrity of Ethnic Studies. We want a curriculum that meets the needs of our youth and carries on the spirit of the original 1968 Third World Liberation Front and Black Student Union strikes, at San Francisco State University **and beyond**. These movements led to the formation of Ethnic Studies as an academic discipline which continues to grow today while honoring the legacy of 1968. It is not too late to stand with us on the right side of history and support an ESMC that will educate, protect, and inspire all our children.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Lucy MSP Burns, Associate Professor, Department of Asian American Studies

Keith L. Camacho, Vice Chair and Professor, Department of Asian American Studies

Jolie Chea, Assistant Professor, Department of Asian American Studies

Jennifer Jihye Chun, Associate Professor, Department of Asian American Studies

Eryn Le Espiritu Gandhi, Assistant Professor, Department of Asian American Studies

Grace Kyungwon Hong, Professor, Department of Asian American Studies and Director, Center for the Study of Women

Jinqi Ling, Professor of Asian American Studies and English

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Karen Umemoto, Professor, Department of Asian American Studies and Asian American Studies Center

Lee Ann Wang, Assistant Professor of Asian American Studies and Social Welfare at the Luskin School of Public Affairs

David K. Yoo, Professor, Department of Asian American Studies

Min Zhou, Professor, Department of Asian American Studies, Department of Sociology

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